

Katharine Hansen, PhD

520 Inchelium Hwy • Kettle Falls, WA 99141 • 386-871-9490 • DD_kathy@tmd9.club
<http://katharinehansenphd.com/WritingPortfolio/>

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Ten Surefire Ways to Organize Your Job Search

By Katharine Hansen

You've decided to look for a new job, but life just feels too chaotic, and you don't know where to begin. Here are some tips to get you going:

1. Don't use your need to organize as a tool to procrastinate your job search. This point is key. It's easy to tell yourself day after day that you'll look for a job as soon as you get organized. Set a time limit – just a few days or perhaps a week at the most – to get your ducks in a row.
2. Designate a headquarters site in your home from which you'll launch your job search. Whether you use the kitchen table or you already have a home office, you'll be more productive if you have a specific place to execute the work of a job search.
3. Eliminate chaos and clutter. I know I have difficulty working when my workspace is piled with books, papers, bills, mail, and junk. Taming your clutter will help clear your mind. Spend a day ruthlessly throwing away things you don't need and finding logical places to store the things you do.
4. Assemble basic equipment. Determine and gather materials and equipment that you will need for your job search. A computer with Internet access and a printer are highly desirable. You'll need pens and paper, sticky notes, a calendar and/or planner, a phone with answering machine or voicemail, and a file box or filing-cabinet drawer in which to store information you collect during the job search. Directed at this concept of a workplace from which to conduct job-hunting, Brian Krueger offers Job Search Central <http://www.collegegrad.com/jobsearch/6-0.shtml>, an online chapter in his book College Grad Jobhunter.
5. Develop a system to track your job search. You'll need a way to monitor which companies and positions you've applied to and the status of each application. Tracking is especially important for followup. If you've applied and heard nothing from an employer or interviewed with an employer, you'll need to track that information so you can make a followup phone call or send an e-mail. Many systems are possible; find the one that works best for you. You could use a columnar pad, legal pad, or spiral notebook. You could use index cards or spreadsheet (e.g., Excel) or database software applications.
6. Make a schedule. Commit to a block of time every day to work on your job search. The amount of time you allot will correspond with whether you are currently employed, as well as other demands on your time. It's often said that successful job-hunting is a full-time job, so consider putting in as close to eight hours a day as you can (if you're

employed, you may put in only a fraction of that time). More importantly, think of the job search as a job that you must report to each day, and begin your job-search day in your designated workplace. Don't spend your entire job-hunting "shift" sitting in your work station, however, because any aspect of your search that keeps you from getting out and networking with people will ultimately slow your search and delay your results (see No. 9).

7. Update and optimize your resume. You'll need to have the best resume possible ready to go when you start applying for jobs. You can find tons of advice for crafting an effective resume here. Consider having your resume critiqued and perhaps revamped by a professional resume writer. Sadly, when I was in the resume business, the vast majority of resumes I saw prepared by job-seekers were weak.

8. List and research organizations you want to target in your job search. Where do you want to work? Start with a list of 20-25 organizations that you consider ideal to work for. While you may respond to ads and Internet job postings that don't represent organizations on this list, you'll find your job search is most effective when you have specific organizations to target. Once you've begun your list, research each organization and consider conducting informational interviews. Use the information you gather to tailor your resume, cover letters, and interview responses to each targeted organization.

9. Start or build your network. Most people get their jobs through networking, so commit yourself to get out there and meet people. Request advice, their business cards, and their suggestion for who else you should be talking to. Start with your list of targeted organizations: Whom do you know in the organization that you could network with? Or do you know other people who know organizational insiders? Then move on to friends, professional organizations, alumni of your college, and other network contacts.

10. Gentlemen and Ladies, start your engines! Once you've reached No. 7 above, you've really begun your search; yet, until you've done that initial organizational legwork, you're not not totally out of the starting gate. Do that foundational work as quickly and efficiently as you can and then respond to ads and build your network and job leads.

Final thoughts

It's time to transcend inertia. Convince yourself that getting organized isn't that hard, and then do it quickly and efficiently. You'll feel much better once you clear away mental and physical clutter and build you job-search momentum.